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The situation in the Middle East

Measures to eliminate international terrorism

Letter dated 13 June 2003 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Israel to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I am writing in order to draw your attention to the latest horrific terrorist attacks perpetrated against the citizens of Israel.

Since the convening of the Summit at Aqaba, Jordan, a new wave of violent attacks has killed 25 Israelis.

On Wednesday 11 June, at approximately 5 p.m. (local time), a suicide bomber perpetrated a massive attack on a public bus in central Jerusalem. Sixteen people were killed and 112 were wounded when the terrorist, disguised as an ultra-Orthodox Jew, detonated a large explosive device on a crowded bus. Two of the wounded are listed in critical condition. The powerful bomb scattered human remains throughout the area of the attack, and the terrorist used nails and shrapnel in order to increase the pain and suffering of his victims. The force of the bomb blew a number of the passengers out of the bus. The terrorist organization Hamas, which continues to operate freely from Palestinian Authority territory, claimed responsibility for the attack.

At this time, the names of 15 terror victims have been released. Among the murdered are Sgt. Tamar Ben-Eliahu, age 20, of Moshav Paran, Alan Beer, age 47, of Jerusalem, Eugenia Berman, age 50, of Jerusalem, Elsa Cohen, age 70, of Jerusalem, Zvi Cohen, age 39, of Jerusalem, Roi Eliraz, age 22, of Mevaseret Zion, Alexander Kazaris, age 77, of Jerusalem, Tzipora Levy, age 70, of Jerusalem, Tita Martine, age 75, of Jerusalem, Yaffa Mualem, age 65, of Jerusalem, Yaniv Obayed, age 22, of Herzliya, Bat-El Ohana, age 21, of Kiryat Ata, Anna Orgal, age 55, of Jerusalem, Zippora Pesahovitch, age 54, of Zur Hadassah, and Malka Renee Sultan, age 67, of Jerusalem. The identities of two of the 17 victims have not yet been released.

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The purpose of such an attack is to kill as many Israelis as possible, and to destroy efforts to resume the peace process. This despicable act of terrorism is among the most recent in a string of attacks, including a combined attack at the Erez crossing, a shooting in Hebron, the murder of a young couple near Jerusalem, the lethal ambush of an Israeli man in the village of Yabed, the firing of Qassam rockets at the southern town of Sderot, and the shooting of two Israeli women in the West Bank.

On Thursday, 5 June, two young Israelis were murdered by terrorists in a wood close to Moshav Even Sapir, near Jerusalem. The victims, David Shambik, age 27, and Moran Menachem, age 17, were brutally beaten and stoned. According to the Jersualem police department, their bodies were found ripped to shreds by means of knives and other sharp implements.

On Sunday 8 June, four Israeli soldiers were killed when three Palestinian terrorists perpetrated a targeted attack on an Israel Defense Forces (IDF) position in the Erez industrial area, situated in the northern Gaza Strip. Among the murdered were three IDF reserve officers, Sergeant First Class Assaf Abarj'il, age 23, of Eilat, Sergeant First Class Udi Eilat, age 37, of Eilat, and Sergeant First Class Chen Engel, age 31, of Ramat Gan. IDF Warrant Officer, Sergeant First Class Baz Emete, age 23, of Beit Shean, was also killed.

Four soldiers were also wounded in the attack, one moderately and three others lightly, when the terrorists opened fire and threw grenades at the outpost. The three Palestinian militants, disguised in IDF uniforms and armed with Kalashnikovs and grenades, infiltrated the outpost by first passing through the checkpoint for Palestinian labourers employed in the Erez industrial zone.

This checkpoint had recently been opened in the framework of confidence-building measures enacted by the State of Israel, ahead of the Aqaba Summit. Since the beginning of the current conflict, there have been six terrorist attacks at the Erez crossing and three terrorist attacks at other crossings in the Gaza Strip, including the attack at the Karni crossing two months ago in which two Israeli civilians were killed. The Fatah Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, Hamas and the Islamic Jihad issued a joint statement claiming responsibility for Sunday morning's attack.

Later on Sunday, Staff Sgt. Matan Gadri, age 21, of Moshav Moledet, was killed in Hebron while pursuing two fleeing Palestinian gunmen who earlier had wounded an Israeli border policeman on guard at the Tomb of the Patriarchs. The wounded Israeli policeman was manning a check post at the religious site, used to facilitate the safe movement of Muslim worshippers. When the Palestinian gunmen were eventually apprehended, Kalashnikov assault rifles and ammunition were found on their bodies.

Yesterday, Thursday, 12 June, an Israeli civilian, Avner Maimon, age 51, of Netanya, was killed when he was ambushed by terrorists in a car adjacent to the village of Yabed. Also yesterday, a Qassam rocket was fired at a factory near Sderot. The same factory has been hit before by missiles. Earlier in the day, a Qassam missile was fired at Sderot, and four Kassam rockets were fired at a number of Kibbutzim situated in the western Negev area.

This afternoon, Friday, 13 June, two Israeli women were seriously injured when terrorists opened fire on their car near Neve Tzuf in the West Bank. The identities of the wounded Israeli civilians have not yet been released.

Today's attack is merely the latest attempt by Palestinian terrorists to target Israeli civilians. Countless terrorist attacks have been prevented in recent weeks and days by the extraordinary efforts of Israel's security personnel. Since the Aqaba Summit last week, Israeli security forces continue to receive, on average, 60 daily intelligence reports warning of attempted attacks and have arrested 10 suspected suicide bombers. Wednesday's gruesome suicide attack in Jerusalem was in the late planning stages by last week, and was the result of long-term preparation by the terrorist organization.

On 23 May, Israel agreed to accept the steps set out in the road map (S/2003/529, annex), indicating the desire of the State and of the people of Israel to renew direct negotiations, in accordance with the conditions, principles and stages laid out in President George W. Bush's 24 June 2002 speech. In the context of this effort to restart the peace process, Israel has already started to implement the commitments it took upon itself at the Summit, including the release of Palestinian detainees, the dismantling of unauthorized outposts and the easing of security restrictions.

Unfortunately, the Palestinian Authority has yet to take one single step towards fulfilling its fundamental obligation to dismantle the terrorist infrastructure which it has nurtured and sustained for so long. It is simply intolerable, legally and morally, for the Palestinian Authority to allow murderous organizations, whose very goal is to commit crimes against innocent civilians, to operate freely in its territory. By refusing to take real and genuine steps to confront terrorism, the Palestinian side is once again endangering any prospects for peace and compelling Israel to continue to take the measures necessary to defend its citizens in accordance with its right and duty of self-defence.

Israel hopes that the new Palestinian leadership will prove that it is serious about ending violence, terrorism and incitement irrevocably, and that it is ready to lay the foundations for genuine peace and reconciliation, rather than just pay lip service to these notions. This must include confronting and eradicating terrorist organizations, such as Hamas, which is responsible for Wednesday's suicide bombing in Jerusalem, in addition to the attacks in Erez and Hebron, and has declared its intention to carry out further suicide attacks. Since 1993, Hamas has dispatched 113 suicide bombers, 72 of them since September 2000. As a result of the above-mentioned suicide attacks, 227 Israelis were killed and 1,393 were wounded. Hamas strives to create a united front among the Palestinian terror groups, and cooperates with terrorist organizations in Lebanon and Syria, as well as other international terrorist organizations.

In spite of Wednesday's murderous terrorist attack in Jerusalem, and other violent attacks which have been perpetrated since the Aqaba Summit, Israel will continue to work towards progress in the peace process in the hope of ending the dire reality in the region, and bringing about peace and calm for all peoples.

Israel calls upon the international community to reaffirm its absolute rejection of terrorist tactics, to accept nothing less than the complete dismantling of the terrorist infrastructure by the Palestinian leadership, and to use its authority to compel all regimes that sponsor and incite terrorism in the region to fulfil their responsibilities in accordance with international law and Security Council resolutions, in particular resolution 1373 (2001).

I submit the present letter in follow-up to numerous letters detailing the campaign of Palestinian terrorism that began in September 2000, which document the criminal terrorist strategy for which the terrorists and their supporters must be held fully accountable.

I should be grateful if you would arrange to have the text of the present letter circulated as a document of the fifty-seventh session of the General Assembly, under agenda items 36 and 160, and of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Arye **Mekel**
Ambassador
Chargé d'affaires a.i.